New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1955

Volume XVI, Number 17 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 10, 1955

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Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Wooden Dish"

Journal American

October 7, 1955

Hail Louis Calhern In a Tragic Drama

By JOHN McCLAIN

Louis Calhern has taken the leading role and directed a new play by Edmund Morris which opened at the Booth Theatre last night. It is a story of the tragic loneliness of old age, the anguish and confusion visited upon the family of an old guy that just won't die.

It is, I believe, a pedestrian tale, but it is performed with such skill by Mr. Calhern and his team-mates that I was sincerely moved. I call it a mild success, certainly a tour de force for Mr. Calhern, and I recommend it to all who have a compelling sense of filial responsibilities.

It is difficult to dramatize the futility and uselessness of an old man. He is partially helpless, he must be watched or he may set the house on fire; yet he has an infinite sense of devotion, he is consumed with love and affection for his family. But, in this case, he is preventing his son's wife from enjoying the normal social life she might have if they weren't giving the old man a home.

So she sells the idea that they'd better have him carted off to a home for the aged. This will give her the freedom to go away with the boarder. There is a memorable moment, something as close as you can get to a love scene between two men, where the eldest son sits down with his pop and tries to tell him he ought to be taken away.

It seemed to me that the story was immeasurably weakened by the character of the man from the old folks' rest. He was selling such a miserable future for pappy, and in such corny terms, that one felt everybody connected with the conspiracy was at fault. He wasn't that much of a problem.

The whole thing winds up with the realization that we are all growing older, and the implied idea that it's better not to linger after the faculties fail. They give the old man "The Wooden Dish" because they're afraid he'll break the China ones. And the wife doesn't go away with her intended lover; she goes back to her husband.

This is an enormous success for Louis Calhern, as the old gentleman. He is very funny and crotchety and vague, and we love him. He has a feeling about his eldest son which leads him to a moment of sheer affection, mentioned before. This is one of the high moments of the play.

He carries the evening, and he transported me with him. Polly Rowles gives him immaculate assistance, as the daughter-in-law and John Randolph, is a plausible tenant who almost lures her away; James Westerfield is heart-rending as the paunchy son. Other contributions are offered by Edgar Stehli and Gordon Tanner.

This is a pleasant evening and a rewarding one. It is not going to burn up the boards, but it will keep them reasonably warm.

"THE WOODEN DISH"

Play by Edmund Morris; staged by Louis Calhern; settings and lighting by Donald Oenslager; costumes by John Boyt; presented by Armand Deutsch at the Booth Theatre, October 6, 1955. The cast:

Lon (Pop) Dennison..Louis Calhern
Clara Dennison.....Polly Rowles
Bessie Bockser.....Jane Rose
Ed Mason.....John Randolph
Susan Dennison..Jacqueline Scott
Sam Yaeger.....Edgar Stehli
Glenn Dennison...Gordon Tanner
Floyd Dennison..James Westerfield
Janey Stewart....Barbara Barrie
Mr. Forsythe....Orville Sherman

DAILY NEWS

October 7, 1955

'The Wooden Dish' Slender Play With Fine Acting by Lou Calhern

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As any Texan will tell you, Texas is a big, loud state and it has been that way ever since the days of Sam Houston and Gary Cooper; but when our dramatists write plays about it they write nice little folk studies like Horton Foote's "The Trip To Bountiful" or last night's "The Wooden Dish," which opened at the Booth Theatre.

This new play, by Edmund Morris, is a folk drama—if you concede that Texans are folks—about the problem of geriatrics. Geriatrics means what to do with old people when they become a pain in the neck. Fortunately for "The Wooden Dish," the old man who is the problem child of the drama is being played by Louis Calhern, who is one of the two best all-around men in the acting business (the other being Fredric March).

It is an enormous pleasure and a lesson in theatregoing to watch Calhern as he goes about impersonating a frail and aged pioneer who is no longer wanted in the homes of either of his sons. His health may not be good, his sight may be half gone and his mind may wander a bit, but this old boy has guts and dignity. Calhern makes not a single false move in his portrayal; voice, gestures, movement, posture—everything is exactly right. Here is a character role which is not overacted—and precious few are the character roles which aren't.

The most touching scene in the play is one in which James Westerfield, the paunchy, balding elder son of the old man, weeps from shame and guilt because there is no place left in the world for his father except a "guest" home for the aged. And the fine old boy finds it in himself to comfort his son and tell him that as the years pass love must turn to pain.

Not Very Robust

Aside from Calhern's performance and one or two scenes of real emotion, "The Wooden Dish" is not a robust play. The old man, who must eat from a wooden dish because he'd drop and break china ones, and who mustn't smoke or drink because of his health, stoutly says, "I have walked slow behind every goddam doctor who ever came to town." But he is not wanted any more in the home of his younger son, because this son's wife can't stand the grind of caring for him any longer.

So the old fellow is finally shipped off to the home, and he goes gallantly. When he declares, "I didn't PLAN to get old," he doesn't say it plaintively, but in simple explanation of where he stands.

Next to Calhern's, Westerfield's is the best performance, probably because it's the best secondary part. But all the roles are well played, with Polly Rowles as the rebellious wife, Jacqueline Scott as a loving granddaughter, John Randolph as a boarder, Gordon Tauner as the other son and Edgar Stehli as a checker-playing old codger from across the way. Calhern has staged the play with quiet realism, and there is a useful cut-out setting of a modest small-town Texas home. I am, however, getting somewhat bored with cut-out settings, and maybe it is time for our stage artists to swing back to solid stuff and turntables for their scenic changes.

Daily Mirror

October 7, 1955

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'The Wooden Dish' Is Too Depressing

• Acting is superb but plot concerns the less palatable facts of life.

"The Wooden Dish" deals callously and yet compassionately with the problem of old age. Edmund Morris has penned an honest and realistic play which, however, strikes us as being too depressing for the average playgoer. Most people would consider having to face the less palatable facts of life bad enough, and, to pay for the privilege, just too much.

Morris is concerned with the Dennison family. Clara Dennison is sick of caring for, and cleaning up after, her feeble father-in-law. She wants some fun out of her existence, and prods her husband to send the elderly man to an old folks' home. Otherwise, she's going to leave the drab premises and go off on her own.

REALIZING he's no longer wanted, at least by his daughter-in-law, Pop Dennison finally accepts the inevitable, and permits the glib proprietor of a second-rate haven for the aged to drive him to what he knows will be a miserable end. His sympathetic grand-daughter wants to sacrifice her immediate future to the gallant veteran's welfare, but he won't hear of it.

Incidentally, the ending rings an ironic note. They have been feeding old Pop out of a wooden dish, fearing to trust his shaky hands with china. As Pop goes off to his doom, the determined Clara asks what she's going to do with the dish. And her daughter suggests saving it against the day when she, too, will be old.

Armand Deutsch has given "The Wooden Dish" a good production. Donald Oenslager has designed an atmospheric setting, and Louis Calhern, doubling as director and star, is excellent. His Pop Dennison is accurate, human and moving. Polly Rowles, as the pleasure-seeking daughter-in-law, manages to be at once selfish and understandable.

GORDON TANNER is effectively forthright as the son torn between father and wife. James Westerfield is quite right as another son, sentimental and practical. Edgar Stehli, one of our better character actors, does well by old Pop's pal. And Jacqueline Scott, making her Broadway debut, is a young actress of quality and promise.

"The Wooden Dish" indicates Morris is a dramatist of real talent. He has not ducked issues. He has tried not to make compromises with his material. He has written a play to respect, if not to enjoy. He has faced a personal problem that most of us would rather solve for ourselves in private rather than public. At least, we would.

The Booth Theatre is not currently a happy place in which to spend an evening. It is one thing to have regard for a script, and another to like it. We found it all too somber.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

October 7, 1955

THEATER

'The Wooden Dish'

By WALTER F. KERR

AS SOME of the other characters in "The Wooden Dish" are trying to cut down on old Pop Dennison's beer swilling in the kitchen, Pop is heard to mutter, "Why, I've busted up better saloons than this!" Why couldn't we have had *that* play?

The play we do get at the Booth is not very invigorating. Old Pop—no one seems to know his precise age—has been living with one of his sons for quite a long time. The son's wife is pretty unhappy about it because Pop keeps accidentally breaking vases in the living room and burning holes with his pipe ashes in the red-checked tablecloths. ("I can't stand it any longer, I tell you, I can't stand it!") A movement is at last afoot to get Pop out and into the rest home up the road a piece. Over the hill, as it were.

Now, Pop is played with quiet inventiveness by Louis Calhern, and I've nothing against him. Mr. Calhern is a long, lanky, perfectly appealing picture as he hunches in silence over a lonely lunch of oatmeal, as he drops his hat on the floor because that's obviously a fine place for it, as he kibitzes over a card game, artfully changes an unpleasant subject, and arthritically waves away help as someone offers him an arm. The detail is fine, and—once or twice—almost touching.

But very little of Edmund Morris' play is spent on its one promising character. Most of the time we are listening to wife Clara (Polly Rowles) telling us how once upon a time she used to go dancing and how nice it would be to go dancing now and won't the ten-dollar-a-week boarder please take her out of all this ("Take me—take me away from here—I just want some fun out of life!"). What do they call this sort of thing these days—detergent opera?

The other folk who inhabit his Texas small town—and even the elder son who comes hustling down from up north—are right off the same tape recorder. Hubby (Gordon Tanner) is an ineffectual sort who can't make up his mind whether he'd like to keep his wife or his father and who keeps saying "Why? Why?" all the time. Boarder Ed Mason (John Randolph) wouldn't mind making a little play for the lady of the house but—when it comes to a showdown—he is too noble for such shady goings-on. Big brother from the North (James Westerfield) is a heavy-set man who doesn't want to contribute much to Pop's support because "You get a little ahead one week, you're behind the next." The rest of the company has its own ready supply of homilies, saws, platitudes, and assembly-line shoptalk, with an especial fondness for the phrase "Answer me!"

It seems to this reviewer that not everything in a play can be plain. If the characters are going to be plain—gingham, suspenders, and all that—then the action had better be interesting. If the action is going to be plain—poker in the living-room and checkers in the kitchen—then the language had better be unusually arresting. Somewhere, sooner or later, something had better sound as though it had come out of an artist's head.

Dialogue-wise, "The Wooden Dish" always settles for the line of least resistance. If some one isn't saying "I felt I could have reached out and touched you," some one else is saying "Then I met Glenn" or, perhaps, "Don't touch me!" Old Pop Dennison's dilemma isn't made dramatic; it is made as ordinary as mortal man, and a good memory, can make it.

As a result, there was a dry eye in the house last night, and it was mine.

The New York Times

October 7, 1955

Theatre: Old Man Calhern in Texas

'Wooden Dish' Opens 'With Salty Star

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHEN Louis Calhern was last in New York he played Old Man Lear in Shakespeare's tragedy. Now he is Old Man Dennison in Edmund Morris' "The Wooden Dish," which opened at the Booth last evening.

It is easy to understand why Mr. Calhern has accepted the part and also directed the performance. For his characterization of an admirable old codger fighting for his self-respect in Texas is salty and amusing. Tall and slender with white hair and mustache, Pop Dennison does look a lot like a touseled Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., the magnificent Yankee whom Mr. Calhern acted a decade ago. Naturally, there is a strange family resemblance in all Mr. Calhern's patriarchs.

But he is a highly intelligent actor with an alert mind and enough technique to supply all Broadway, with a little left over. Bent down with age, his arms flung out, he assumes the posture of a scarecrow. But he is all man. The Calhern spirit keeps his personality crisp. The deep, rolling Calhern voice makes him pleasant to listen to. And note the occasional crinkle around the eyes and mouth: that is the Calhern sense of humor, which is sociable without being sentimental.

Once you start thinking about it, Pop Dennison is lucky to be played by Mr. Calhern. That's the reason he is such good company in the theatre. That's why you believe in his unconquerable

spirit when he has to make a hard decision in the last scene.

Unfortunately, that is why it is hard to believe in the premise of the play. "The Wooden Dish" insists that Old Man Dennison is such a trial and nuisance in his son's home that his son and daughter-in-law have to pack him off to the old folks' home. The domestic crisis is complicated and long. The daughter-in-law is in her thirties, still has a nice figure and wants to have some fun. Things seem to be tough all over in Texas—of all places.

There is no reason why you should have to go step by step through all the Dennison rows. They are dreary and unoriginal. And nothing anybody can do in the production or performance makes them less hackneyed than they are.

Donald Oenslager, the illustrious scene-designer and professor at Yale, has provided a skeletonized house and yard that ought to make any Gothamite envious. The cast is attractive. Polly Rowles cannot help being more agreeable than the author's idea of the daughter-in-law. Jacqueline Scott is sweet and thoroughly personable as the indomitable granddaughter. As the middle-aged son summoned from Chicago, James Westerfield gives an excellent portrait of a tired man who is troubled by good instincts.

Count on Edgar Stehli to describe the character of a neighbor with a few effortless strokes and a lot of sincerity. Jane Rose, John Randolph, Gordon Tanner, Barbara Barrie and Orville Sherman are pleasant or deplorable, as the case may be, with the other roles of the local people.

But nothing they can do dispels an impression that "The Wooden Dish" is machine-made goods run up out of some handy mill ends. And the folks in Texas are going to be mighty angry when they hear that a Texas couple is dumping Mr. Calhern out of a Texas home. Apart from the bad taste involved, it's not hospitable.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 7, 1955

'The Wooden Dish' Opens at the Booth

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Wooden Dish" at the Booth concerns a problem for which there is no satisfactory solution.

Nobody is entirely happy when the very old must live in the laps of their descendants. The young have as much claim to freedom and privacy, as the old have to consideration and love.

Something has to change. In this case, it is the daughter-in-law. The old gentleman talks a good deal, and his eyesight prevents reading. He sets things on fire with his pipe, and he breaks the china with his trembling, so he has to eat from a wooden dish.

Heartless Jab.

His son's wife fails in her attempt to have the old man sent to a home. Desolate at the thought of her lost youth, she makes a heartless jab at running away with the boarder.

Her outburst just about ruins any relationship with her husband and their daughter and his brother.

But in the end, the old man takes off in a final gallant gesture of independence. And the age-old story is repeated of family love and devotion being handed on down the line, instead of being paid back.

Squarely Enough.

Edmund Morris' play faces the problem squarely enough. It refuses to take sides with any finality, and the result is that few of the characters are very sympathetic. It winds up topheavy with plot.

The central role of the old gentleman is played by Louis Calhern with fine vim and freshness. He refuses to let the old man be sorry for himself, and he does not indulge in any actorish trick of indicating old age.

The figure he cuts is like an eroded mountain, proud and positive, sensitive and direct, and perfectly aware of senility.

James Westerfield makes the most interesting other character in the play, a son who is called in to the Texas home from Chicago. With Calhern, he plays the drama's most moving scene, when the older man tries to recapture the old, honest understanding he once had with his eldest son.

And the middle-aged son suddenly becomes again, for just a moment, a desolate youngster dissolved in tears.

The couple in whose house the action occurs, are ordinary enough people. Polly Rowles and Gordon Tanner are hard put to it, to make these parts very interesting.

New York Post

October 7, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Old Man Who Wasn't Wanted

This has been a lively week in the theater, but its subjects haven't been exactly cheerful. On Monday night, the seeming inevitability of wars and the futility of peacemakers was discussed. On Tuesday, there was a contemplation of the ugliness of sex on lonely islands. We saw an enchanting little girl taken off to die in a Nazi concentration camp on Wednesday. And last night at the Booth, where a play by Edmund Morris called "The Wooden Dish" opened, a weakling son allowed his wife to send his poor old father to a home for the aged and unwanted.

Thanks to a moving third act, an upsetting topic, and an effective performance by Louis Calhern as the old man, "The Wooden Dish" is an interesting play. Its final emotional punch, together with a chillingly sardonic tag line, makes it, I think, an effective if intentionally uncomfortable evening in the theater. But I can't help believing it is also a little disappointing because the quality that raises it from the dubious status of a tear-jerking soap opera is never taken advantage of with the honesty that would have given it tragic dignity.

The Old Man

The play's central figure is a splendid old Texas pioneer who is ending his days on sufference in the home of his younger son and his restless daughter-in-law. He is frankly a trial to the younger people. He gets in the way, he is garrulous, he breaks things, he has a way of setting his bed on fire with his pipe, and they have difficulty with him at the table. And the daughter-in-law has become so irritated with him that she threatens her husband with walking out on him unless his father is sent off to that home for old people.

What makes "The Wooden Dish" something more than the emotional tale of the good old man persecuted by bad younger people is that the wife really has a case. There is much to be said on her side, because the father does dominate the home and present her with a genuine domestic problem. But the play isn't content with a fairness to both sides that would have made the old fellow's tragedy all the more poignant because no one was really to blame for it. So the author stacks the cards against the wife by making her a disagreeable woman and rather a monster.

Wife and Boarder

He also embarks on something of a side issue by showing her on the verge of having an affair with a boarder and planning to run off with him. I know that this is intended as a kind of dramatic symbol of the bitterness brought into her life by the old man's disruption of normal domesticity. But it doesn't quite work out that way. It chiefly tends to make her even more disagreeable, and what would have been a tragic struggle between two people, both with a certain justice on their side, becomes an emotional contest between goodness and cruelty.

Mr. Calhern plays the old man with his usual skill, and he is very touching in the role, although I must say he looks younger and healthier than most of the drama critics. Polly Rowles is handicapped by being made into something of a villainess, but she is effective from that point of view. There is a fine performance by James Westerfield as the older son, while Gordon Tanner as the browbeaten one, John Randolph as the boarder, Edgar Stehli as the victim's loyal friend and Jacqueline Scott as the sympathetic granddaughter are excellent. Despite my complaints, I don't deny the final emotional effectiveness of the play.

"The Diary of Anne Frank"

Daily Mirror

October 6, 1955

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Diary of Anne Frank' A Gripping Drama

• Play based on young girl's observation of Gestapo persecution and its impact.

During World War II, a couple of Jewish families were penned up in the attic of a house in Amsterdam, Holland. Gentile friends kept them supplied with such food as was available. When it looked as though they would escape a Nazi concentration camp, what with the landing of American and British troops in France, the Gestapo finally ferreted them out.

The Frank family, who gave haven to other Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution, had a precocious daughter named Anne. She kept a diary, recording in it the joys and heartbreaks of people constantly in danger. They had their little quarrels, herded together as they were, with too little to eat, but on the whole they were a human and courageous bunch.

• • •

FRANCES GOODRICH and Albert Hackett have leafed through the pages of little Anne Frank's diary, and wrought a play that has real emotional impact. They never indulge in melodramatics, but rather, with sympathy and understanding, convey vividly the plight of the Franks and their guests.

So "The Diary of Anne Frank," which Kermit Bloomgarden brought to the Cort Theatre Wednesday evening, is a gripping work. Without ostentation or obvious theatrics, it tells simply the story of what happens to civilized and decent people under terror. It portrays their happinesses, squabbles, fear and essential nobility.

After an absence of a year or so in London, where his wife, Ruth Gordon, has been appearing in "The Matchmaker," Garson Kanin has returned to stage the new arrival with admirable restraint and telling effect. Being a successful playwright himself, he knows more than a little about the weaknesses and strengths of a script, and he knows what to do with good actors.

• • •

YOUNG SUSAN Strasberg brings a glow to the role of Anne Frank. She catches all the poignance of an adolescent wiser than her years. Joseph Schildkraut, who was so moving as the eccentric Spaniard in "Love's Labour's Lost" a season or so ago, plays her father with a simple dignity that is compelling. He has the art which conceals art.

Gusti Huber, one of our better emotional actresses, etches Mrs. Frank with sure strokes. She is never showy, but there is a genuine feeling in her performance. There also are first-rate portrayals by Dennie Moore, Lou Jacobi, David Levin, Gloria Jones, Eva Rubinstein, Clinton Sundberg and Jack Gilford.

Boris Aronson has designed a most useful unit setting, which permits the action to flow freely and give continuity to an episodic script.

The Franks and their guests are warm-hearted and likable people. What happens to them is calculated to keep you on the edge of your seat. You enjoy their minor victories, and sympathize with their despairs: "The Diary of Anne Frank" is a tender and touching play about real people.

"THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK"

Play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, based on the book "Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl" by Anne Frank; staged by Garson Kanin; production designed by Boris Aronson; costumes by Helene Pons; lighting by Leland Watson; presented by Kermit Bloomgarden at the Cort Theatre, October 5, 1955. The cast:

Mr. Frank...Joseph Schildkraut
Miep.....Gloria Jones
Mrs. Van Daan....Dennie Moore
Mr. Van Daan.....Lou Jacobi
Peter Van Daan....David Levin
Mrs. Frank.....Gusti Huber
Margot Frank....Eva Rubinstein
Anne Frank.....Susan Strasberg
Mr. Kraier....Clinton Sundberg
Mr. Dussel.....Jack Gilford

New York Herald Tribune

October 6, 1955

THEATER

'The Diary of Anne Frank'

By WALTER F. KERR

NEARLY all of the characters in "The Diary of Anne Frank"—they are Dutch Jews hiding out from Hitler in a dingy and overcrowded garret—are doomed to death. Yet the precise quality of the new play at the Cort is the quality of glowing, ineradicable life—life in its warmth, its wonder, its spasms of anguish, and its wild and flaring humor.

Perhaps no scene in the play is more touching than that in which a fifteen-year-old girl and a nineteen-year-old boy enter into the formalities of courtship. They have, with their families, been cooped up on the top floor of an Amsterdam office building for nearly two years. They have seen each other morning, noon and night during all this time, eaten together, squabbled together, been terrified together, simply grown up together.

• • •

When the time comes, though, for each to seek the other out in a shy, faltering, heartbreaking romance, they at once begin to behave like lovers who have just been introduced. In her own little corner of the densely populated living quarters, the girl piles her hair on top of her head and hopefully drapes a scarf about her shoulders; in his cubbyhole the boy puts on a jacket, straightens his tie, and trembles in expectation. The girl 'goes out' for the evening to see him—just across the room, past her chess-playing parents, past the boy's greedy father and frivolous mother—to a door that opens gently not more than twenty feet away.

• • •

The circumstances around her are the circumstances of despair and decay. In the midst of this, a fresh and shining dignity, a springtime innocence and an instinctive honor rise to fill the shabby room. Since you know that Anne Frank's life is to end in the horrors of Belsen, the play cannot help but break your heart. But along the way it takes great care to let you know that the moments of living—short as they were—were all moments of growth and discovery and very great joy.

Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett have fashioned a wonderfully sensitive and theatrically craftsmanlike narrative out of the real-life legacy left us by a spirited and straightforward Jewish girl. Garson Kanin has not so much staged it as orchestrated it—from the simple and homely rhythms of a silent couple doing the dinner dishes to the sudden, catlike tensions of an alarmed household listening in panic to a telephone bell that may be a warning.

Authors and director together have given us a series of vivid, utterly lifelike yet colorfully dramatic pictures: the happy new refugees stripping off layer after layer of concealed clothing, the night-time stir that responds to an adolescent's scream, the religious ritual by candlelight that turns into an antic round of gift-giving.

• • •

And Mr. Kanin has found a superb company for the purpose. A few seasons ago young Susan Strasberg suggested, in an off-Broadway performance, that she had the magic of which stars are made. That star is beginning to shine now—not with absolute authority, perhaps, but with a puppyish effervescence that is like a promise of the world on a platter.

If Miss Strasberg has a little difficulty still with the reflective passages that come with the girl's new maturity, she has nothing but enchantment to bring the earlier scenes of tomboy fire and prankish ebullience. Clambering over the furniture, pounding her hands against her head excitedly, dancing demurely with her father, or donning oversize trousers for a flash of mimic impudence, she is breathtaking.

• • •

Joseph Schildkraut's controlled and confident father is a tower of strength to the family—and to the play—he must hold together. David Levin's boy-next-door is quietly moving. Jack Gilford's fussy dentist, Lou Jacobi's eternally hungry business man, Dennie Moore's vain and pathetic wife, and Clinton Sundberg's restrained friend of the oppressed are all crystal-clear portraits. And you aren't likely to forget Gusti Huber's drawn face across a festive table as she realizes with absolute certainty that they are all bound to be discovered.

Boris Aronson's gabled setting, from which the homeless look out on a thousand homes, is brilliantly drawn, a stunning background for a play that is—for all its pathos—as bright and shining as a banner.

Journal American

October 6, 1955

Stark Study Of Terror

Skilled Cast Combines to Offer Powerful Evening in the Theatre

By JOHN McCLAIN

"THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK," the literal dramatization of the book, which was presented last night at the Cort Theatre is a searing study of the suspense and torture visited upon a group of Jewish people hiding out from the Nazis in Amsterdam during World War II.

Here we see the emotional crises that build up within any extraneous group forced by circumstance to live within confined quarters for a protracted period. Through it all comes the voice and the writings of Anne, adult and incisive, recounting the day-by-day occurrences, yet remaining singularly detached and philosophical in relation to the outcome.

There are the minor bickerings regarding the food, the chances for survival or escape, the methods by which the threat of detection are averted. And through it all there is Anne's poignant love story with the young Dutch boy whose future is as tenuous as her own.

Absorbing Story

There is an authoritative quality to the tale that makes it absorbing; one has the feeling that this is not theatre, this is real. No unnecessary emphasis is placed on small incidents which might be devastating, life proceeds with the incongruous ease which usually settles around people in severe straits.

The mood grows, and we become part of this heroic group: the theft of a crust of bread becomes a federal case, the ringing of an off-stage phone a symbol of doom. And when, at the end, there comes the realization that the struggle has been futile, we are moved to sincere despair.

Maintains Pace

Joseph Schildkraut, playing the role of Anne's father, is an understanding and forceful patriarch, holding the group together through the strength of his patience and fortitude. Susan Strasberg is an extremely charming and sympathetic Anne, making her debut on Broadway and reaping laurels for the tradition founded by her father, Lee, head of the Group Theatre.

Other excellent contributions are offered by Gusti Huber, as the mother; Dennie Moore, Jack Gilford and Clinton Sundberg. Garson Kanin has performed a miraculous job of moving his people around Boris Aronson's ingenious two-deck set, yet maintaining pace and perspective.

"Anne Frank" is a powerful and wonderfully well played evening in the theatre, and should be around for a long time.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 6, 1955

Faith Under Stress Revealed in 'Diary'

BY WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Diary of Anne Frank" is theater at its finest.

The new play at the Cort glows, timeless and inspiring. It is a dramatization of an actual diary, kept by a young Jewish girl while she hid from the Nazis for two years in an attic apartment.

The genius of this play is that there is nothing grim or sensational about it, and it makes no bid to rely on suspense for its interest.

Instead it relates the flowering of a youngster who was pure in heart, whose faith bloomed with her mind and body, under the most terrible scourge of history.

8 People Together.

Eight people are hidden for two years in the cramped apartment—Anne, her parents and sister, another couple and their son, and a lonely dentist.

The drama brings them all to life through Anne's eyes as she writes in her journal. It begins in a prologue, after all except her father have died in a concentration camp, and returns for an epilogue.

Anne is a high-keyed child whose energy tries the older nerves in their incarceration. But she is a bright, honest girl whose sensitivity leads her to devise ingenious gifts when her elders' imagination fails them.

The climaxes are small, but the tension, in the will to survive is enormous.

There is the rise of hope with the invasion and the following setback. One of the men is caught stealing food and nerves snap. Always there is the fear of discovery, supported by the need to avoid friction.

All Go to Camps.

In the end, they must go to concentration camps. And Anne goes, smiling. She never stopped believing that, in spite of everything, people were good.

Young Susan Strasberg, playing Anne for indelible memories, makes the play possible. It is an endless role, and she acts it with healthy sweetness and a variety of comic spirit that is astonishing.

Joseph Schildkraut is starred as her father and is fine in the role of mediator who must remain calm and make decisions. His wife is beautifully performed by Gusti Huber, whose human simplicity can tear your heart out.

Dennie Moore is unaffected as a shallow rich mother, and Lou Jacobi makes a human grouch of her husband. Jack Gilford contributes a touching picture of a lonely man, and David Levin is the shy and inarticulate youngster Anne loves.

Garson Kanin has directed a dry masterpiece of emotion in this amazing story.

The New York Times
October 6, 1955

Theatre: 'The Diary of Anne Frank'

Lovely Drama Staged From Girl's Book

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THEY have made a lovely, tender drama out of "The Diary of Anne Frank," which opened at the Cort last evening. They have treated it with admiration and respect.

"They" are Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, who wrote the dramatization; Garson Kanin, who directed; Boris Aronson, who designed the setting, and a remarkable cast in which Joseph Schildkraut is the star. Strange how the shining spirit of a young girl now dead can filter down through the years and inspire a group of theatrical professionals in a foreign land.

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Among them, not the least and perhaps the finest is Susan Strasberg, who plays the part of Anne. Although Miss Strasberg once appeared at the Theatre de Lys, this is her official Broadway debut, and it is worth particular notice. She is a slender, enchanting young lady with a heart-shaped face, a pair of burning eyes and the soul of an actress.

By some magic that cannot be explained, she has caught the whole character of Anne in a flowing, spontaneous, radiant performance. Anne is a girl—not the stage image of a girl—but a capricious, quick-tempered, loving maiden whose imagination is always running ahead of her experience. whether that is Anne or Miss Strasberg it is hard to say at the moment, for they are blended into one being. It looks artless because Miss Strasberg has created it with so much purity from within.

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From any practical point of view the job of making a play out of the diary of Anne Frank is impossible. Perhaps that is why Mr. and Mrs. Hackett have succeeded so well. They have not contrived anything; they have left the tool-kit outside the door of their workroom. They have absorbed the story out of the diary and related it simply.

It is the story of some Jews hidden in an Amsterdam garret during the Nazi occupation, fed by some friends and successfully secreted for a couple of years. Nothing momentously dramatic happens. It is a story of stealth, boredom, bickering, searching for comfort in other people, dreams, fears, hunger, anger and joy.

It is lightly bound together by the character of an adolescent girl who is on tip-toe before life. She is amusing and vexing. But also unconquerable because she is in love with life and squeezes the bitterness and sweetness of every moment that comes her way.

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Everyone associated with the production has caught some of her spirit and has preserved her innocence and faith. The garret Mr. Aronson has designed glows with an elusive beauty. As Papa Frank, Mr. Schildkraut plays with taste and kindness. The members of the rather boorish Van Daan family are played with perception by Dennie Moore, Lou Jacobi and David Levin. Jack Gifford's nervous, crotchety dentist is amusing and precise.

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Gusti Huber's patient mother whose nerves are once unstrung and Eva Rubinstein's loyal, placid sister complete the closely knit Frank family. As the two people from outside, Clinton Sundberg and Gloria Jones bring into the play some of the freshness and also the anxiety of the normal world.

But it is Miss Strasberg who puts the clearest print of truth on the whole enterprise. Her Anne is the same that won so many hearts when the book was published. Out of the truth of a human being has come a delicate, rueful, moving drama.

DAILY NEWS
October 6, 1955

'Diary of Anne Frank' a Splendid Drama, Beautifully Done at Cort

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There is so much beauty, warm humor, gentle pity and cold horror in "The Diary of Anne Frank" that it is difficult to imagine how this play could be contained in one set on one stage. Last evening it was so contained at the Cort Theatre, but I felt that at any moment it might break out of its confines and run laughing and sobbing into 48th St. This is a fine drama, beautifully acted, directed and mounted.

Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett have "adapted" the play from the diary of a Jewish girl of early teen age who hid from the Nazis in Amsterdam from 1942 until almost the end of the Second German War, and then, when freedom was so near, died in the extermination camp at Belsen. As it appears on the stage of the Cort, "The Diary of Anne Frank" is not in any important sense a Jewish play; it is the story of how eight people manage to live for more than two years in three bedrooms and a living room-kitchen without once moving out of these quarters. It is a story of the galant human spirit.

Could Have Been Hell

The central character, Anne Frank, is a Little Orphan Annie brought into vibrant life—a spunky, mischievous, clear-headed girl with a bursting yearning for living. As she writes in her diary from day to day, we sometimes hear her voice as she writes . . . and then the lights come up and we see what happens next in the crowded little apartment on top of a business building in Amsterdam, where a benign friend has hidden eight people for the duration.

Without the gallantry of the human spirit, this apartment could be a hell a few stories above the earth. One must make no sound in the daytime, lest the workers below should hear. One must not draw water or flush the toilet, wear shoes or talk much above a whisper. Only at night can one relax and indulge in a joke or a pent-up quarrel, and eat if smuggled food has come. But this place is not a hell above ground; it is a testing place in which men and women and children earn the blessed right to be alive.

Superb Young Player

As Anne Frank, young Susan Strasberg gives a superb performance. She is a brat when she is brought to this prison, and by the time the Nazis come for her she has become a woman. She must have remembered what her father said the first night they came to this place: "Remember, there are no walls, no bolts that anyone can put on your mind."

The drama moves from week to week and year to year, and in the intervals one can hear the inner voice of Anne as she makes a new entry in her diary. In the case of this play, this is not a handy theatrical device but a part of the play itself, and it is most absorbing.

The company is unfalteringly admirable — Joseph Schildkraut as the father, Gusti Huber as Anne's mother, Dennie Moore and Lou Jacobi as another couple, David Levin as their son, Eva Rubenstein as Anne's spinster sister, Jack Guilford (now a long way from being the absurd Frosch in "Fledermaus") as the lonely eighth inhabitant of the prison loft.

Garson Kanin has staged the play impeccably; he has given it breadth and scope and at the same time a wonderful attention to detail. And Boris Aronson's setting is one of the finest my eyes have encountered in years of playgoing. Most sets are just something to be looked at and to keep the actors within bounds; this one looks as if it is being lived in. Last evening I was living in it.

New York Post

October 6, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Moving Story of Anne Frank

There is a shattering sense of reality about "The Diary of Anne Frank," which Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett have dramatized from what must have been one of the most heartbreaking documents of the late war. By wisely shunning any trace of theatricality or emotional excess, the playwrights have made the only-too-true story deeply moving in its unadorned veracity, and, with young Susan Strasberg giving a lovely and sensitive portrayal of the title role, last night's opening at the Cort Theater provided a sense of truth that is unusual in playgoing.

There are some things which it is wrong to forget, and so, 10 years after she died in a German concentration camp, there is every good reason for remembering the story of the little Jewish girl who, with her family and some family friends, hid out in a garret in Amsterdam under the Nazi occupation for two years, only to be taken off to prison an ironically short time before the liberation by Allied forces. All of this was actually set down in the child's diary, and it is presented here with the straightforward accent of complete credibility.

The Document

Since they were dramatizing a document, the authors were completely right in setting it down in documentary fashion. But to call their dramatization a documentary play is perhaps to give a false indication that there is no emotion in it. The truth is that there is the deepest of feeling in it, but it is there by understatement, by implication, and in the quietest and therefore most convincing terms. There isn't a Nazi in it. There isn't a fabricated or highly-colored moment. Perhaps there is a minimum of art, but there is a maximum of honest compassion.

It isn't a play about heroes, either, save possibly in the modest courage of Anne's father. These trapped Jews in their garret are never romanticized. They are very ordinary human beings, who quarrel, are selfish, know fear and envy, display petty malice, and have no grand and ennobling emotions. But because they are such commonplace human beings, the sufferings and indignities heaped upon them are all the more terrifying, and we can share their experiences in a fashion we couldn't if they had been idealized or made larger than life.

The Heroine

Even Anne herself, with her valiant spirit and her warm nature, is not sentimentalized. She is an entirely fallible little girl, who sulks, chatters, has a temper, rages at her mother, gets hysterical, and is quite capable of making a nuisance of herself. Yet somehow, amid all of the terrors surrounding her, she grows in spirit and understanding, and it is the play's major tragedy that such important loveliness was to be destroyed. Anne also had humor, and her tale has its humorous scenes that are all the more moving in their tragic context.

The title role imposes the most difficult tasks on Miss Strasberg, and she manages them enchantingly. It is a beautiful performance, warm, rich, at times with comedy overtones but always moving and real. You can see the girl growing in stature, and it is a touching experience. There are other good performances, particularly, I thought, by Joseph Schildkraut as the father, Gusti Huber as the mother, Lou Jacobi as a weak-spirited inmate of the garret, and Jack Gilford as a dentist given to whining. "The Diary of Anne Frank" is a moving document on the stage.

"Island of Goats"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 5, 1955

'Island of Goats' Unusual and Mystic

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The Italian playwright, Ugo Betti, is a tantalizing artist. Whatever else you might think of his "Island of Goats," it is unusual.

In this passionate and mystic drama at the Fulton, constant symbolism is so subtly employed that an onlooker must make private decisions as to its application.

"Island of Goats" is obsessed with the struggle of human beings to be more than animals. Betti has shorn his play of any but the most elemental facts.

The central figure is a possessive woman whose marriage has failed when she called her husband's intellectual bluff. He could no more succeed in the isolation she provided than he had in a busy society.

Life on the Farm.

Now she lives primitively with her daughter and sister-in-law, on a decaying farm. Her masochistic bitterness has finally let her achieve true numbness, until she is closer to the goats on the island than she is to her family.

Into this sterile atmosphere comes an amoral lecher, who has known her hushand in the prison camp where he died. The woman succumbs to him immediately. In short order the daughter and sister have followed her lead.

Jealousy and humiliation overcome the woman. The visitor is trapped in a well. His terror so unnerves the trio that the mother is able to send the other two away. She settles down to an eternity of bullying punishment.

Betti challenges his audience to imagine and to think, rather than making factual statements. It is permissible to surmise that the present translation does not always do him justice, with its academic vocabulary, and its frequent reference to "things."

Uta Hagen Superb.

The play's escape from pretentiousness and utter obscurity depends largely on the intense and essential performance of Uta Hagen as the mother.

She has passion and force, and a rare quiet concentration. This is an actress with the power to convince you, solely because she believes what she says.

Laurence Harvey plays the visitor handsomely, with erratic jauntiness. Under the circumstances, practically any kind of man could have won these ladies. For Betti's purposes, though, the role might add effect to the drama, if the visitor were dirtier and more sinister.

Ruth Ford has flashes of telling wilaness in the ill-explained role of the sister, and Tani Seitz reveals authentic dramatic strength as the harassed daughter.

"ISLAND OF GOATS"

Play by Ugo Betti, adapted by Henry Reed; staged by Peter Glenville; setting and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Motley; presented by Roger L. Stevens and Hardy Smith, Ltd., at the Fulton Theatre, October 4, 1955. The cast:

Edoardo.....Henry Sharp
Pia.....Ruth Ford
Angelo.....Laurence Harvey
Agata.....Uta Hagen
Silvia.....Tani Seitz

DAILY NEWS
October 5, 1955

'Island of Goats' Very Literary

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Island of Goats," by the late Ugo Betti, Italian poet and dramatist, is an extremely literary variant of Oscar Wilde's story of Salome, without the excitement of music by Richard Strauss. It has been adapted by an English poet, Henry Reed, and last evening Roger L. Stevens and Hardy Smith Ltd. gave it a lovely and polished production at the Fulton Theatre. But it takes more than fine words and good actors to make a play, and "Island of Goats" lacks the most necessary ingredient of all—interest.

In the opera, Salome left Jokaanan in a well because she couldn't have him, and hastened his death by having his head amputated. In the play, Uta Hagen leaves Laurence Harvey down a well and just lets him die there because she can't have him. Jokaanan was a godly and noble man; Harvey plays a rascal who is full of charm and talk. I have an idea that if Miss Hagen had relented and let him out of the cistern he would have talked himself to death in another act. This would have achieved the same ending, but with more peril to the audience. It is all right for actors to talk themselves to death because they are paid for it—but if the production of such highly verbal works as "Tiger at the Gates" and "Island of Goats" continues, some paying customer is going to listen himself to death and there will be a big scandal.

No Time at All, Much

"Island of Goats" purports to take place on an island given to goat-raising somewhere in the Mediterranean. Three women live, manless, in a cool and gloomy mill house with a well in the floor—a widow, her sister and the widow's daughter. They are unhappy and they look it. Along comes this glib and charming tramp and in no time at all—well, not exactly no time at all, for it takes all evening—he has chattered all three of them into what dramatic poets call surrender. When he goes down the almost-dry well to fetch a bottle of wine, the widow decides he had better be left down there for safekeeping.

Harvey, young English actor known here for his movies, is a player of great charm, grace and humor. Miss Hagen maintains the studied air of the tragedienne, and the other two members of the bum's little herd of women are capably played by Ruth Ford and Tani Seitz. They have been directed with great deliberation by Peter Glenville. Jo Mielziner's lofty setting and crafty lighting are nice works of theatrical art.

Henry Reed's translation of the Betti drama may be a minor work of literary art, for much of it sounds well; but essentially it is not theatrical. It belongs, with "Tiger at the Gates," in a book, where it might very well be admired.

Journal American
October 5, 1955

Expert Portrayals By Imposing Cast

Drama by Late Italian Poet Presents a Baffling Theme

By JOHN McCLAIN

THIS is a frank admission that I haven't the vaguest idea what "Island of Goats" is about. This play by the late Italian author-poet Ugo Betti, translated by Henry Reed, opened last night at the Fulton Theatre with an expert and distinguished cast, limitless words, tears and frustrations, and an imposing Jo Mielziner set.

I sat there like a little soldier, catching every phrase, running it carefully through the Rube Goldberg device that serves as a brain, but nothing much came out at the end of the production line. Now I ask you:

An engaging and evil young man arrives at the sequestered home of three ladies on an island in the Mediterranean; a widow, her adolescent daughter and her sister-in-law. The fact that he was a fellow prisoner with the widow's deceased husband induces them to give him lodging and he proceeds, with singular success, to engage in affairs with all three.

Sinister House

They haven't been having a very good time, these three lassies locked up together in a sinister old house, but the presence of this delectable and amazingly active young fellow in their midst leads to no end of travail. The widow has been happy enough to enjoy him and pass him along to her sister-in-law, but when he gets her daughter in his sights, and it is obvious that the young girl, who has secretly succumbed anyway, is eager to continue the relationship, the mother revolts.

Well, what do you do? In this case you get the young man to go down into a well, conveniently front stage center, and the rope ladder slips off the hook. This boy is in real trouble; he is down a well without a ladder. And he has to stay there while the dolls sit around and discuss things like "eternity" for a couple of days. The mother keeps saying it is only a joke; they want to teach him a lesson, and for a few minutes I thought the whole thing might turn into comedy. But no; the boy tries to climb up the side of the well, falls, and dies.

Assured Playing

What do you make of this? All I know is that a rather selfish and persuasive young man invades a household and has extraordinary success with the three female occupants. He lies to them when they wish to be lied to, he is amusing and beguiling, and they all fall for him. So why don't they haul the poor bum out of the cistern? Is this the eternal voice of woman's conscience? Is this their method of squaring the odds?

I dunno. I can tell you that Uta Hagen, as the young widow, gives one of her assured and studious performances; that Laurence Harvey, the boy, is ingratiating and decorative in his first bow to Broadway; and that Ruth Ford gives a striking portrayal of the love-starved sister-in-law.

Tani Seitz, in her initial dramatic role, is acceptably bewildered and shaken as the daughter in her first brush with life's realities; Henry Sharp is an amiable local cab driver.

More than that I cannot tell you. There may be a moral that is overpowering and important and a scarlet thread of significance that is woven through the fabric. To me it meant one thing, and I will transmit this to the members of my sex: boys, keep away from wells!

New York Post

October 5, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Young Man Down in the Well

There is a well in the millhouse that Jo Mielziner has designed as the setting for "Island of Goats," and, as soon as the garrulous young man of the drama started his display of sex appeal, I began thinking it would be a good idea if someone put him down that well and left him there to cool off. Since this is exactly what the author eventually does, I suppose I should be grateful to him. And I am. But it's still impossible for me to say anything kind about his odd little play.

This "Island of Goats," which opened last night at the Fulton Theater, has been adapted by Henry Reed from the Italian of Ugo Betti, and I've been told that Ugo Betti is Italy's most important playwright since Pirandello. A few years ago we saw another Betti drama here called "The Gambler," which seemed rather better than "Island of Goats." But, unless the dramatist is being betrayed by his translators, his presumable eminence is a dubious tribute to the current Italian theater.

Two Comparisons

It is true that the episode of the man marooned in the well by three vengeful but amorous women has a certain interestingly Poe-like quality. The method used by weak women to punish strong men may also call up memories of the Giraudoux of "The Madwoman of Chaillot." The comparisons are in both cases fairly distant and certainly have nothing whatever to do with quality, but the only part of "Island of Goats" I found entertaining was this particular section of it.

The events leading up to my favorite episode were somewhat as follows: A handsome and mysterious youth comes to the island of the title to see three women, the widow of a professor who had died in a concentration camp, her innocent daughter, and the sprightly sister of the dead man. He tells them he was a prison companion of the professor. The first two ladies don't seem to like him, but, despite the daughter's attempt to shoot him, he has very little trouble seducing all three.

Everything might have gone along quite idylically if he hadn't started getting arrogant about his dubious conquests. He also talked too much. He told dull stories about his humorous adventures. At one point, he said: "How mysterious human actions are!" Having thus proved he was a philosopher, he later demonstrated that he could be whimsical. "I'm a real pussy cat," he told the daughter. It didn't surprise me that he got entrapped in that well. What astonished me was that there was some sentiment among the girls in favor of letting him out.

It also surprises me a little that three such talented actresses as Uta Hagen, Ruth Ford and Tani Seitz were interested in playing, respectively, the resentful widow, the friendly sister and the sensitive daughter. The young man is played by Laurence Harvey, an English film actor. I'd rather not commit myself about Mr. Harvey's skill until I've seen him under happier circumstances. As for Ugo Betti—well, I don't know the work of Henry Reed, the adapter of "Island of Goats." Maybe he's to blame.

New York Herald Tribune

October 5, 1955

THEATER

'Island of Goats'

By WALTER F. KERR

ONE OF the characters in "Island of Goats" is, I believe, the devil, and his principal activity in the new play at the Fulton is the seduction of three lonely women in a millhouse. As a punishment, he is condemned to spend the entire third act at the bottom of a deep well. A more fitting punishment might have been to send him out front to listen to the rest of the play.

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"You do nothing but run about after each other in this house," expostulates the devil—a goatish young fellow who has drifted in out of the customary nowhere—as he is working upon his very susceptible victims. The statement is an accurate one, one of the few really graphic remarks made in the course of a singularly vaporish evening.

Up and down a very handsome Jo Mielziner staircase — well, there are actually three or four staircases, some of them stone—slip a sorrowful widow, her dewey-eyed daughter, and her waspish sister-in-law. They are all good eavesdroppers. They lurk in the shadows beneath slatted and rotting ceilings; they sidle in at doorways with night-lights; they rustle to and fro clasping one another and the devil alternately.

Each spends the night with the lightly bearded stranger who has come to bind their souls. Each hears the call of the goat and feels the lure of the grass. Each spends a great deal of time urging the others to get out of the place—quick.

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And all the time nothing is really happening. Ugo Betti's play—here translated from the Italian by Henry Reed—is statically conceived: around a fixed and unchanging pole of evil a handful of moths slowly revolve. It is also philosophically, rather than dramatically, conceived: the characters are mere counters in an abstract game that is not taking place in a millhouse at all, it is taking place in the author's mind. The subject that is being discussed is the power of the flesh; and there is no flesh anywhere to be seen.

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There are fleeting traces of it, to be sure, whenever Uta Hagen is given a line or two that describes a bit of life that took place some time before the curtain went up. Using a narrow and pathetic little smile—and that catch in her throat between words that is already familiar to us—she breathes a glimmer of reality into a memory of a child being shocked at the killing of a goat, or into a moment in which she tries to shatter her daughter's illusions about the family life they once shared.

She does something better than that, in fact. One of the playwright's essential symbols in this dialectical round-robin is the passion the goatherd comes to feel for his goats, the urge he develops to lie in the fields and "baa" back at them. Miss Hagen is compelled to describe just such an experience, and to bleat feelingly by way of illustration. She does it with such quiet intensity and such miraculous control that not a trickle of laughter is heard through the house.

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Laurence Harvey is the insinuating visitor who winds up—none too soon—an echoing voice in the subterranean depths, and he is at the very least industrious. He is willing to bring enormous amounts of energy to the business of playing childlike little games with the girls, blowing them kisses, shaking his shock of hair at them, and lolling enticingly on a sack by the fireside. It is an active performance, but not an intellectually interesting one. Ruth Ford's sister-in-law is not much more than a mournful echo from the sidelines, and Tani Seitz' daughter—with flaxen hair and the long, slender lines of a Swiss figurine—is a pretty curio with all too little substance.

Jo Mielziner's massive setting may be the one element in the production that succeeds in evoking the diabolism that interests the playwright. With its striking vertical lines and its faint shafts of light through a broken ceiling, it is a veritable bottomless pit—and a chilling one.

"How mysterious human actions are," exclaims one of the foursome late in the evening. The actions of automatons are more mysterious still.

The New York Times
October 5, 1955

Theatre: Man Mumbling From a Well

Ugo Betti's 'Island of Goats' Is Deep

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ONE man: three women. With the exception of an elderly Italian who makes two microscopic appearances, that is the entire population of Ugo Betti's "Island of Goats," which opened at the Fulton last evening.

The imbalance of sexes gets everybody in a jam. First, one woman; then another; then, it's time for the third. But just at the festal moment, the man falls down a well, and stays there, moaning and pleading through the entire third act. The three women stand around in various parts of the scenery discussing what to do, if anything.

In the end they do nothing. Two of them take off for Broadway and Forty-sixth Street. The third slumps down at the rim of the well, muttering and groaning pregnant phrases.

The late Ugo Betti's "Island of Goats" won the Italian National Drama Prize in 1950. It had a healthy run of two seasons in Paris. For it is portentously symbolic, and never means what it says, which is a blessing. After suitable study one could presumably abstract its meaning, and thus learn how to lead a more enlightened life.

But "Island of Goats" has certain fundamental theatrical defects that discourage cerebration. It is swallowed up in gloomy space, Jo Mielziner's

And, in Truth, It's Also Dank and Dull

symbolic set towering so high that it pokes through the roof of the theatre. It is ugly to look at. It is almost motionless. The man talks a blue streak of sexless obscenities, which are monotonous. But the women make only the most sparing remarks after long pauses, and they are fairly toneless when they do. What they say is likely to be a caricature of all that is pretentious and humorless in the theatre.

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Years ago Synge said that in the theatre one must have reality, and "that is why the literary drama has failed." It insists on eliminating people on the stage and driving them out of the auditorium. In Italian and in French "Island of Goats" may have had some qualities of life that are missing in Henry Reed's English version.

But it is unlikely that they could survive Peter Glenville's monotonous production. It is virtually static. As the versatile man, Laurence Harvey talks continuously and moves now and then. But the women seem to be forming a series of tableaux on different stage levels, always representing something too deep for words.

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They are Uta Hagen, Ruth Ford and Tani Seitz, all Equity members in good standing, and good citizens, too. Doubtless they are also kind to all who suffer in every walk of life. Let them have a little mercy on all those who suffered in the theatre last evening politely resisting dullness. There were heroes on both sides of the footlights.

Daily Mirror
October 5, 1955

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

Italian Import Opens At the Fulton Theatre

• Betti's 'Island of Goats' a shocking, cynical comment on human race.

"There's disorder here," cried Agata, "there's chaos!" Agata happens to be one of the characters in Ugo Betti's "Island of Goats," and a darn fine critic to boot. She might have added: "There's a lot of symbolism mixed up in this mess." And we, for one, aren't going to try to fathom it.

"Island of Goats" is the latest play by the Italian bore to reach New York. The first was "The Gambler." That one also made theatre-going unpopular for quite a spell. The new arrival at the Fulton Theatre is all flossed up in a semi-poetic translation by Henry Reed. The usually astute Roger L. Stevens and Hardy Smith Ltd. are perpetrating it on the American public.

THE BAFFLING SCRIPT has to do with a devilish vagabond who comes to an eerie mill-house on an island in the Mediterranean. It is inhabited by three lonely women, a mother, her sister-in-law and a daughter. They are sex-starved and, before the evening is over, all have joined the satyr's harem.

Then follows much soul-searching and anguished recrimination. Bitterness and jealousy, humiliation and ugly self-knowledge drive them to vengeance. They trap their tormentor down a well, and let him gurgle to a watery end. The two less determined flee the island leaving the earthy Agata to deal with the remains.

"Island of Goats" is a shocking, cynical comment on the human race. It implies that we were nothing better than animals, motivated by lusts and instincts rather than intelligence. Well, that's a rather bald statement of what we think Betti has to say. But if you want to plumb this tedious opus for further meanings, you're on your own.

Jo Mielziner has done a stunning set, while Motley has contributed accurately drab costumes. Peter Glenville, one of our favorite directors, has staged this study in degeneracy as if he were etching figures on Grecian vases. We haven't seen so many arty, stained-glassy attitudes over recent semesters.

LAURENCE HARVEY, making an unfortunate American debut; Uta Hagen, Ruth Ford and Tani Seitz capture most capably all the sordid implications of the unsavory piece. Gifted players all, they make the most of their opportunities, and achieve Glenville's pretentious interpretations with courage and straight faces.

We particularly liked newcomer Harvey. He is a master of style, of the bravura. It is regrettable that we had to see him first in such an unpalatable and unprofitable role.

Betti has been hailed in Italy as the most important dramatist since Pirandello. Though we refuse to accept this verdict, on the basis of what we have seen and read, we must admit that he is a modern Cagliostro. For he has the magic to hypnotize such usually discriminating men of the theatre as Stevens, Glenville and Alfred Drake.

As our pal Bob Francis, of Billboard, observed during an intermission, "'Island of Goats' is 'Afternoon of a Faun,' with overtones of Sem Benelli." And Sem Benelli penned a magnificent "Jest."

"Tiger at the Gates"

DAILY NEWS

October 4, 1955

A Stuffed 'Tiger at the Gates'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As soon as I finish paying my profound respects to "Tiger at the Gates," which has been most beautifully produced and acted at the Plymouth Theatre, I am going home and go back to sleep. Unless some late-late television movie catches my fancy.

"Tiger at the Gates" must be good, or at the very least wonderful, because at last evening's premiere an excellent and intelligent audience kept applauding after the final curtain until the star, Michael Redgrave, stepped down to the apron and thanked us for our warm reception. A curtain speech doesn't happen very often these days, and when it does happen you can be sure, or fairly sure, that the audience wants it. So there is little doubt that last night's play and performances were a triumph. The reason I got so sleepy must have been something I heard.

A Big Effort

The comedy is by the late Jean Giraudoux, a French dramatist with a dry and bitter sense of humor whose "Madwoman of Chaillot" is one of the best things I've seen in the last two decades. The translation is by Britain's Christopher Fry, a junior Shakespeare. The production, according to the program, is the joint and mighty effort of the Playwrights' Company in association with Henry M. Margolis and Robert L. Joseph, Harold Clurman, director. It comes hot from London.

From what I was able to gather, "Tiger at the Gates" is an intellectual, witty and cynical sermon about Man's eternal need to go to war. The bond which holds mankind together is "the brotherhood of enemies." When the gates of war are closed, the foe which assails them from without is not war, which is fun if a dame is involved, but peace, which is wonderful but makes no headlines.

The locale is ancient Troy, and the characters include Andromache, Cassandra, a laundress, Hector, King Priam, Ajax, Ulysses, Paris and Helen. Everybody, indeed, except the wooden horse, and he must have been left out because they didn't have talking horses in those days. These people talk about war and international relations, and a little bit about sex, and they talk it nice and loud.

A Tempting Helen

The old Helen of Troy merely had a face which launched 1,000 ships. The one in "Tiger at the Gates," Diane Cilento, also has a figger noble enough to be respectfully called a torso. She moves around in a white Grecian gown tempting people, mostly me. Redgrave, as Hector, has all the important speeches, including a really beautifully delivered ode to warriors who have senselessly died in battle.

Other incisive performances include those of Felix Munso as Ajax, a low-class drunk, and Walter Fitzgerald as Ulysses, a clear-thinking man who will probably bore the hell out of Penelope when he finally gets home. Leueen MacGrath is stately in the role of that prophetess of doom, Cassandra, and Morris Carnovsky is resounding as Priam, the man who had 50 sons and never got sued for it.

The production is visually beautiful, with settings and costumes designed by Loudon Sainthill which might arouse old Homer to new ecstasies if he could see. Unhappily for this report, Giraudoux' and Fry's Homer is not Chapman's Homer. "Tiger at the Gates" bored me and I refuse to be bullied into thinking it is intellectual.

"TIGER AT THE GATES"

Play adapted by Christopher Fry from the play "Le Guerre de Troie n'Aura Pas Lieu" by Jean Giraudoux; staged by Harold Clurman; settings and costumes by Loudon Sainthill; presented by Robert L. Joseph, the Playwrights' Company and Henry M. Margolis at the Plymouth Theatre, October 3, 1955. The cast:

Andromache...Barbara Jefford
Cassandra...Leueen MacGrath
Laundress.....Judith Braun
Hector.....Michael Redgrave
Paris.....Leo Ciceri
Priam.....Morris Carnovsky
Demekos.....John Laurie
Hecuba.....Catherine Lacey
Mathematician...Milton Selzer
Lady in Waiting.....
Jacqueline Brookes
Polyxene.....Ellen Christopher
Helen.....Diane Cilento
Messenger.....Ernest Graves
Troilus.....Peter Kerr
Abneos.....Howard Caine
Busiris.....Wyndham Goldie
Ajax.....Felix Munso
Ulysses.....Walter Fitzgerald
A Topman....Nehemiah Persoff
Olpides.....Jack Bittner
Senator.....Tom McDermott
Sailor.....Louis Criss

New York Post

October 4, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Drama of Forceful Distinction

"Tiger at the Gates" is a play of beauty, dignity and quality. Adapted by Christopher Fry from the late Jean Giraudoux' "The Trojan War Shall Not Take Place," it combines all the lyric eloquence for which the English dramatist is famous with the dramatic imagination and philosophical insight characteristic of the eminent Frenchman. It is a happy collaboration. Superbly acted by Michael Redgrave in a performance of genuinely heroic stature, the drama opened last night at the Plymouth Theater and thereby gave the theatrical season its first touch of authentic distinction.

It has always been my impression that what the eloquent but discursive Mr. Fry needed to restrain his excessive preoccupation with the sound of his own voice was some other playwright's scenario to keep him more or less to the point. I think "Tiger at the Gates" both justifies my conviction and indicates that Giraudoux was just the right man for him. There are still occasions when a little cutting might have been advisable, such as in a too-lengthy scene between Helen of Troy and Andromache, but any such minor weaknesses, while regrettable, are more than made up for by the power of the drama, the irony of its tragedy and the real wit of its lighter moments.

As its original title implies, "Tiger at the Gates" takes the classic theme of the Trojan War to make a modern point about wars in general, as it shows the unavailing efforts of Hector and Ulysses to prevent Greece and Troy from going into battle. It is the sort of play that has the capacity to say many things to many people, but my own belief is that it is chiefly concerned with showing bitterly how the constant talk of war and the insistence that a war is inevitable will have the inevitable result of bringing one about, despite the most desperate efforts of wiser men and women to prevent it.

But it is by no means a mere thesis play. What it implies is there for those to see who will, but its values are chiefly human, not didactic. For it is a drama that gives reality to classic figures and makes their joys and sorrows credible, moving and significant. There is humor in it, and a streak of satire and a fine, sharp wit, but it is, I think, the heroic quality that is most impressive, particularly since it is so beautifully written. There is, for example, a scene in which Hector, forced to make a funeral oration for the soldiers killed in a border war, apologizes to them on behalf of the living, which seems to me magnificent.

This heroic quality is certainly present in the writing, but it is there in large part because Mr. Redgrave gives so stirring a performance as the peace-loving Hector. I have seen this fine actor give many a notable portrayal, but never before has he achieved the peak that he reaches in "Tiger at the Gates." Playing with impassioned sincerity, he is moving, tragic, humorous, witty and eloquent, and he gives Hector the stature of a hero without ever losing the role's humanity. I think it is one of the memorable characterizations of the modern theater.

Under Harold Clurman's sympathetic direction, there are a number of other excellent performances. I thought there were especially good ones by Leueen MacGrath as Cassandra, John Laurie as a chauvinistic poet, Wyndham Goldie as a kind of pompous international lawyer, and Leo Ciceri as Paris. In the important role of Ulysses, Walter Fitzgerald is effective, although possibly just a trifle colorless, and, as Helen of Troy, who is something of a seeress in her own way, Diane Cilento is striking in an odd but interesting manner. In brief, "Tiger at the Gates" lives up to the high hopes I had of it in London last summer.

The New York Times

October 4, 1955

Theatre: The Men of Troy Cry Peace

As Giraudoux' 'Tiger' Treats of War

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AGAIN the voice of Giraudoux is heard in a theatre, conveying wit and thought with elegance. The voice has never said anything more pertinent.

"Tiger at the Gates," which opened at the Plymouth last evening, discusses a soldier's attempt to stop a war. Orginally, the play was entitled "The Trojan War Will Not Take Place," which was an ironic slogan. For Hector and Ulysses, despite their wisdom and piety, cannot keep the Trojan civilians from grappling with the throats of the Greeks. Twenty years ago, when this play was written, Giraudoux did not believe that an ancient evil could be stamped out.

But the quality of "Tiger at the Gates" does not rest on Giraudoux' intellectual conclusion. In Christopher Fry's translation, the drama is a stunning piece of work. A cross between Sophocles and Aristophanes, it wrestles with some big ideas with passion and humor. Magnificently acted by Michael Redgrave and a notable cast, beautifully staged by Harold Clurman, it is a contribution to thought as well as a sardonic entertainment.

As a poet who accepted war as a test of manly valor, Homer would be astonished by the nature of Giraudoux' inquiry. In "Tiger at the Gates" Hector debunks the myth of Helen's fatal fascination. He is weary of war. In his oration for the dead he defies convention by begging their pardon. He persuades Helen to go back to Menelaus, and Paris to release her.

To preserve the peace he accepts an insult from Ajax. His passionate sincerity even touches Ulysses, who, against his better judgment, accepts a peaceable adjustment of Paris' abduction of Helen. The men of brains and experience agree that the Trojan war will not take place.

But Giraudoux was a poet with a very worldly mind. And the most characteristic delights of "Tiger at the Gates" are his satirical strokes against the patriots who do not have to risk their devotion in battle. The mealy-mouthed poet who feels most glorious while the armies are fighting for his country, the goatish old men who believe in risking the nation for a pretty face, the international lawyer who puts his professional honor above the safety of the nation, the old king who does not want customs changed—these are makers of war with their cant and their pious mumbo-jumbo.

Giraudoux is the man to make them look not only dangerous but silly. Although the literary style of "Tiger at the Gates" has a classical ring, the satire is neat, modern and deadly. Like all the Giraudoux plays, this one is literature.

It is also theatre. Aware of all its values, Mr. Clurman has staged it like a classic without letting it look solemn. Loudon Sainthill's chaste setting has the solid balance of classical drama, and his costumes are simple and lovely.

The acting is uniformly superb. In the central part of Hector, Mr. Redgrave gives an overwhelmingly passionate performance that is never lacking in dignity or style. He is an imposing actor with fiery sincerity. There are no weak spots anywhere in the performance—Leueen MacGrath's ominous cynicism as Cassandra matching Walter Fitzgerald's patience and benevolence as Ulysses, and Diane Cilento's voluptuous guile as Helen matching John Laurie's fatuous stupidity as the poet.

The long cast includes a number of other talented people who get to the point with skill and honesty—Morris Carnovsky as the paternal Priam; Barbara Jefford as Hector's loyal wife; Catherine Lacey as a bitter-tongued Hecuba; Felix Munso as a roistering Ajax; Wyndham Goldie as the disingenuous lawyer.

The subject is momentous; as always, the voice of Giraudoux is civilized. What he says in the last scene is not comforting. But he says it well. And who knows?

Journal-American

October 4, 1955

Provocative And Brilliant

Allegorical Drama Presented With Humor and Elegance

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE WILL BE A GREAT deal of controversy about "Tiger at the Gates," the Jean Giraudoux play which opened last night at the Plymouth Theatre. There will be those who find it endlessly talky; others who fail to grasp its import; some who grasp it and don't like it; but I believe there will be few who are not profoundly moved.

For here is an allegorical drama of depth and grandeur, translated to English by Christopher Fry with humor and elegance and an intimate sympathy with the characters. It will not be everyone's cup of tea, but it should be a requirement for any thoughtful theatre addict.

It seems to me there are at least a dozen interpretations that could logically apply to the play; my own choice happens to be that the author has used the Trojan war formula to prove the inevitability of wars in general and the immutable conduct of the people who provoke them.

Cynical Spirit

There is Cassandra, the cynical spirit of doom, who hails the advent of the tiger at the gates; there is Andromache, the embodiment of marital devotion; Hector, the idealistic warrior who will reform the world; Ulysses, the realist; Demekos, the poet with his head in the clouds; Helen, the sorceress, and Paris, a selfish symbol of abandon.

Here are the elements, in fine array, the emotional factors which drive peoples to clutch at each others' throats today. There is even the suggestion — or am I reading too much into the text? — that international efforts for appeasement only result in speedier hostility.

Whatever the construction, the fact remains that this is notable, adult theatre. This is the language as it should be spoken; these are thoughts that transcend the plight of a lady in a bath-tub, or the daydreams of a summer bachelor. Yet there are many moments of superb wit.

Michael Redgrave, as Hector, gives a dynamic and studied potrait of a warrior who is aware of the futility of conflict, yet is powerless to prevent it; Diane Cilento is an exceptionally seductive Helen and an accomplished actress (Note: Ava Gardner, look out!); and in the role of Demekos, John Laurie has a delightful time with the play's most comical lines.

Bright Spots

Other bright contributions are offered by Walter Fitzgerald as Ulysses, Leueen MacGrath as Cassandra; another charmer named Barbara Jefford, as Andromache; Morris Carnovsky, Leo Ciceri, Catherine Lacey, Wyndham Goldie, Nehmiah Persoff and Howard Caine.

Loudon Sainthill ran up some tasty costumes, especially for the girls, and two sets which, although rather stark, provided a suitably suggestive picture of the environs of the palace at Troy.

I happen to be one of those who believe the people spent too much time standing still, talking interminably, but I could be quite wrong because the talk is awfully good and I was never bored. Maybe we've just been educated to believe there should be more movement onstage.

This is a brilliant and provocative evening; if the customers screaming for "better" theatre don't support this one they will have only themselves to blame. It's strictly for them.

Daily Mirror
October 4, 1955

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Tiger at the Gates' A Magnificent Play

• But it demands constant attention for its proper understanding.

In our book, the late Jean Giraudoux was one of the two best modern playwrights, the other being G. B. Shaw. For he had insight, wit and a fine sense of fantasy. We have seen his "The Enchanted," "The Madwoman of Chaillot," "Amphytrion" and "Ondine" over here. Now we have the privilege of seeing "Tiger at the Gates."

Some time ago Robert L. Joseph persuaded Christopher Fry to make an English translation of this trenchant satire on war, and Michael Redgrave to star in it in London. It ran there for many months. Currently, the Playwrights' Company is sponsoring the Joseph production at the Plymouth Theatre.

IF YOU value intelligence, wisdom and beauty of speech, you must not miss it. If you are averse to coping with language of import, that demands your constant attention for its proper understanding, you had better forget all about it. We happen to be a Giraudoux fan, and had a wonderful time.

The "Tiger" in the title is destiny, the inevitable. It comes to Troy in the form of the fair Helen. The sensible and valiant Hector seeks to avert the catastrophe of war. The prophetic Cassandra predicts it. She's an unpopular gal about town, for she is always telling stup'd people what they didn't want to hear.

So honest and earnest is Hector that he even talks the wily Ulysses into agreeing to take Helen home, without reprisals or reparations. He wins over the drunken and quarrelsome Ajax, only to have the local poets and politicians precipitate the disastrous conflict. So that Homer, a fellow versifier, could celebrate it for the ages.

JOSEPH HAS brought over some of the original cast, including Redgrave, and filled the other roles with the best available Equity talent, of necessity. And we suspect the performance we saw was not quite as well integrated or compelling as those that hypnotized London.

Redgrave has the stature, voice and conviction for the sane and dedicated Hector. Like many generals, he knows the horrors of war from experience and wants no more part of it. Barbara Jefford is handsome and well spoken as his wife Andromache. Leueen MacGrath could easily have overdone, but never does, the tempting role of Cassandra. She is smooth and yet incisive.

Diane Cilento is just about perfect as the vain and empty Helen. A peculiar nasal quality, a sort of Mae Westian slinkiness are the tools she uses to recklessly ensnare and betray. Catherine Lacey is admirably restrained but, nevertheless, highly effective as the realistic, knowing Hecuba. Leo Ciceri is right as the philandering, not overly bright Paris.

WALTER FITZGERALD is an unctuous and shrewd Ulysses. Wyndham Goldie is amusing as an international lawyer who can render a decision to suit the fee. John Laurie has his moments as the shrill demagogue Demokos. Morris Carnovsky brings a resonant voice to Priam. Youthful Ellen Christopher and Peter Kerr are good as Polyxene and Troilus.

Under Harold Clurman's direction, the American premiere seemed to be a shade too strident on occasion. Subtleties, we thought, went by the board to the detriment of the whole. Rapier thrusts were often made with broadsword strokes.

Still, "Tiger at the Gates" proved fascinating theatre for us. Here is a magnificent and eminently rewarding play. One to cherish, what with our present-day dearth of genius.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune
October 4, 1955

THEATER

'Tiger at the Gates'

By WALTER F. KERR

Most anti-war plays are written by idealists; it makes them hopeful and fuzzy. "Tiger at the Gates," the Jean Giraudoux anti-war play that came to the Plymouth last night, was written by a realist—that is to say, by a man who knew that the only possible way an anti-war play could end was in war. This makes it dry, crisp, clear, witty, and profoundly shocking.

Indeed, it is the realist in Giraudoux that makes even his sombre message tolerable. The playwright is, in this instance, following the fortunes of Hector—Hector, just back from a war he has learned to loathe, eager to lavish his love on his wife and a son yet to be born, determined above all to keep the palace scandal about Helen and Paris from bursting idiotically into fresh conflagration.

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But Hector is surrounded by the good, the pure and the beautiful — all determined upon death. Poetry is against him; the hymns to glory are just waiting to be sung. ("Poetry and war, they make a pretty couple"). Love is against him; the world needs the image of Paris clinging to Helen, even if Helen doesn't love Paris and Paris doesn't care. The priests are against him, because the gods have spoken through them ("Why can't the gods speak for themselves sometime?") and besides, they have read the future in the entrails of a goat. ("I'd give a great deal to see the entrails of a priest," mutters Hector.) The niceties of law, the sophistries of honor, the very cynicism of the enemy—Helen is a mere pretext for the greedy Greeks—are all closing in.

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That tiger, then, that is licking his lips outside Troy, "prowling noiselessly up the palace steps and pushing open the door with his snout," is simply Destiny—what is going to happen, reason and passion and hypocrisy notwithstanding. Giraudoux lets it happen, leaves Hector standing with a bloody sword and a certain knowledge that his son will remember him as a body on a battlefield.

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And yet the play is, for most of its run, exhilarating. It is exhilarating because it is honest about the motives of men. It is exhilarating because its people—both the conscientious and the crafty ones — are intelligent. (They do not dodge around verbal corners; they come right out with it, challenging and sneering and begging as they come). It is exhilarating because a caustic mind has found irony and generous laughter in the whole sorry spectacle and because Christopher Fry has translated that mind with a biting precision.

This is not to say that the piece is a tidy sample of playmaking, or that it is going to satisfy the customer who sees it because he couldn't get into a musical. The tensions do flag a bit in the extended second act, largely because they have been ready to snap for so long. The evening is, quite frankly, a rueful debate; when Hector says "Very well, you shall have your oration," he means it. Some of the more fancifully playful passages are less amusing than the waspish exchanges at the fiery center of the struggle.

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But the intellectual intensity is there, and it is more than enough for an engrossing, sometimes deeply disturbing, time in the theater. Under Harold Clurman's handsomely pictorial and thoroughly alert direction, a distinguished company—most of whom have been playing the work in London—drives home the epigrams with the precision of steel.

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Michael Redgrave is the towering, restlessly determined Hector. The range of the role finds him wonderfully ready; he is savagely mocking as he tries to find sufficiently colorful horrors to satisfy Helen's taste for beauty, he is brilliantly sardonic as he searches in vain for a tear in Helen's eye, he is very moving indeed as he remembers the cheap consolations he has given to men writhing in death on the field.

Diane Celento's cool, pliant, milk-white Helen is a marvel of insolence. With her antenna-like eyelashes sweeping nations into the dustbin, her one dainty hoof pawing the ground before her impatiently, and her detached nasal voice slicing reason into ribbons, she is a creature from the moon—a terrifying one. Walter Fitzgerald's despairingly philosophical Ulysses, Leueen MacGrath's tart and sinuous Cassandra, Catherine Lacey's restrained Hecuba, Barbara Jefford's straightforward Andromache—all are sharply defined, swiftly telling images.

The burden of the piece is heavy, and it is carried by words. But the words are pointed, trenchant, and alive.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 4, 1955

'Tiger at the Gates' Play of Distinction

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The current season takes on true distinction with "Tiger at the Gates" at the Plymouth.

It is a play of substantial, poetic thought and racy wit, acted with mellow assertion, and delivers vast joy to the eye.

Giraudoux has given us some of the finest plays of the century. His genius is again clearly in evidence.

This work has been translated by Christopher Fry with unusual simplicity and clarity.

This dissertation on war springs from the ancient situation of Helen's abduction from Greece by the Trojan Paris. The whole play concerns the efforts of his brother Hector to avoid the war of reprisal which the Greeks are bound to wage.

No sacrifice of pride or honor is too much for Hector, if he can keep peace. But the point made by the moving play is that complacent belief in destiny, the Tiger, can defeat the noblest hero.

Here Hector has won his point by a hair's breadth when a hysterical warmonger destroys the chance of peace for a song.

Michael Redgrave achieves for the first time in this country the stature recognized as his in Britain. It is a massive performance, often still, which soars with the drive of passionate conviction when necessary.

The most memorable scene of the play is the argument between Hector and Ulysses, played by Walter Fitzgerald. The debate gives with eerie calm, an explanation of the causes and uses of war. Fitzgerald plays with quiet power in a fine characterization.

The plum of the ladies' roles is of course Helen, represented as an exquisite icicle with a lurid mind. It is most amusingly acted by Diane Cilento, delicious to look at and slyly witty, in her tones of chalky resonance.

Leueen MacGrath delivers her finest local performance as the seeress Cassandra, most attractive to watch, and devastating in her humor.

Barbara Jefford has the statuesque grandeur for Hector's wife, and all the strong style her role demands. Catherine Lacey is a wry and peppery Hecuba.

Harold Clurman has given the play a fluid beauty of movement that lends a sense of period to even its sharpest fun.

"The Young and Beautiful"

The New York Times

October 3, 1955

Theatre: Flirt With Ideas

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ABOUT half way through the evening "The Young and Beautiful," which opened at the Longacre on Saturday, settles down to work and becomes an interesting play.

Sally Benson has written it from some of F. Scott Fitzgerald's short stories. The place is Chicago; the time is forty years ago. Her major problem is how to make a vain, frivolous adolescent girl a dramatic character. In the writing, and also in Lois Smith's temperamental acting, Josephine Perry is an irritating flirt for about an act and a half. Her charm is small compensation for her scheming, cheating, lying and her greediness about men.

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But Miss Benson has something more in mind than another comedy of adolescence. Presumably taking her point of view from Scott Fitzgerald, she mixes a little gall with the romance. Although Josephine is patently outrageous, she is also desperate. Other people may regard her as a spoiled brat who is out of control. But Josephine knows that she is seeking the unobtainable.

In the last act, she is a frightened, pathetic young lady, headed for the sort of doom that Scott Fitzgerald coveted. Although he was fascinated by sin, he had a puritanical sense of the punishment that sin exacts from gay transgressors; and "The Young and Beautiful" represents him faithfully.

Author of the stories from which "Junior Miss" was made, author of the book for the musical version of "Seventeen," Miss Benson is an old hand at the humors of adolescence. While she is developing the character of Josephine in "The Young and Beautiful," she sketches in some amusing scenes with the young and the insufferable — the premature decadents, the premature courtesans, working hard to make their little world wicked and glamorous.

To tell the truth, this is not the most original or the most interesting part of Miss Benson's drama. Nor is it the most enjoyable part of Miss Smith's highly-wrought performance. Granted that Josephine is a nervous young lady, Miss Smith's over-acting makes her unbearable also. There must be a happy medium somewhere.

In the middle of the second act, when it is apparent that "The Young and Beautiful" is weighing Josephine's character seriously, Miss Smith's quicksilver acting is fresh and wonderful—a tempest of wild hopes and anxieties and quite an accomplishment. Under Marshall Jamison's direction, there is some enjoyable acting in other roles, too—notably Peter Brandon's grave young blade with a quick mind, and James Hickman's youthfully obtuse Yale undergraduate.

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Douglas Watson as a suitor in spite of himself; Margot Stevenson as a lovely, though troubled mother; Jay Barney as an affable father; Jane McArthur as Josephine's tolerant girl friend; James Olson as a handsomely uniformed aviator —ably complete the performance.

Eldon Elder has provided a useful setting that expresses the ugly splendor of advanced interior decoration in 1915. Motley's costumes are superb —gorgeous as well as theatrical. On the whole, "The Young and Beautiful" is intelligent and enjoyable. Given a little time to get started, it gets under the skin of a good idea.

"THE YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL"

Play by Sally Benson, based on the short stories by F. Scott Fitzgerald; staged by Marshall Jamison; settings by Eldon Elder; costumes by Motley; presented by Robert B. Radnitz in association with Lawrence Baker Jr. at the Longacre Theatre, October 1, 1955. The cast:

Josephine Perry.....Lois Smith
Tillie.....Jean Jeans
Travis de Coppet..Peter Brandon
Mr. Perry.....Jay Barney
Anthony Harker..Douglas Watson
Mrs. Bray.....Virginia Morgan
Mrs. Perry....Margot Stevenson
Lillian.....Jane McArthur
Sonny Dorrance..James Hickman
Ed Bement.....Barry McGuire
Capt. Dicer.....James Olson

New York Post

October 3, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Pretty Girl Who Couldn't Love

Not knowing the F. Scott Fitzgerald stories on which it is based, I'm unable to say how closely Sally Benson's new comedy, "The Young and Beautiful," which opened Saturday night at the Longacre Theater, adheres to their spirit and letter. But it struck me as quite a surprising little play; all humorous nostalgia and smiling contemplation romantic boy-and-girl love on the surface, but at heart sardonic, chill and disillusioned. I found it oddly interesting to watch its youthful sentimental dream turning inexorably into a nightmare.

In the first of its three acts, there is every evidence that Miss Benson, who wrote the charming and successful "Junior Miss," is bent on giving us an affectionate 1915 version of her earlier comedy. There is the lovely girl who fancies herself a femme fatale at 16, dances the maxixe with an absurd young man who thinks he's a sophisticate, and behaves tantalizingly toward all the other gilded youths of the period. There are her parents, who regard their child with loving indulgence and look with some consternation at the antics of her callow suitors.

The Heroine

The atmosphere of family life and youthful courtship in Chicago during the days when the earlier world war was looked upon as a distant European phenomenon is presented with attractive lack of ostentation and considerable humor, and the stage seems set for an agreeable romantic comedy with young love triumphant. Certainly the pretty girl, with her charming little affectations, her laughable attempts at sophistication and her sweet seriousness, appears destined to be the proper heroine for such a tale. But the cute child isn't what she seems.

The truth is that she is something of a minor monster. The fact that she shamelessly leads the young men on, throws herself at them when they show a lack of interest, and flees in dismay when they take her pretense for actuality, isn't what places her in that category. Her trouble, and her tragedy, is that she is utterly incapable of affection or genuine emotion of any kind. Indeed, she is virtually a pathological case, in desperate need of masculine admiration but unable to respond to it.

Lois Smith

This questionable heroine presents quite a problem for Lois Smith, the attractive young actress who plays her, and I think Miss Smith manages her difficult task admirably. She has just the quality of romantic prettiness required for the role, and the skill to combine in a believable portrait the charm, attractiveness and essential hollowness of the beautiful girl incapable of love. There is just one catch in it. The part tends to be a little monotonous in its affectations and, as a result, a trifle shrill and tiresome upon occasions, but, on the whole, hers seems to me a fine, sound job of difficult characterization.

While they are far less important, the other roles are well played, too, and I particularly liked Peter Brandon as the juvenile sophisticate, Margot Stevenson and Jay Barney as the mother and father, and Jane McArthur as the girl's loyal and victimized friend. Douglas Watson, James Hickman and James Olson are also helpful as three luckless suitors, and the set by Eldon Elder and the costumes by Motley aid attractively in capturing the atmosphere. "The Young and Beautiful" has its monotonous moments, but its curious combination of nostalgia and bitterness interested me.

Journal-American

October 3, 1955

Golden Girl Drama Of Brass Age Hailed

Sally Benson Catches the Flair Of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Stories

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE JOYS and heartbreaks of adolescence, the flaming problems of the youth of Chicago, circa 1915, were given a nostalgic airing with the arrival of "The Young and Beautiful" at the Longacre Theatre Saturday night. A series of F. Scott Fitzgerald short stories have been woven by Sally Benson into an incisive and poignant consideration of a golden girl who loved lavishly, if not well.

Miss Benson has an unerring ear, and her people and environs are riddled with the atmosphere Fitzgerald created with such mastery. From the hideously ornate fireplace in the Perry living-room to the Victrola and the overstuffed chairs, the characters posture and prattle against a background of upper bourgeois luxury.

There is the local dandy of the age, a youth who dresses and speaks in profane flamboyance; the somewhat older career man; a Yale student in a Norfolk suit (I'm told the Norfolk didn't appear until 1920. Right?); and a dashing young captain, home from the war on furlough.

Much Frippery

These are the beaux in the life of Josephine Perry, a lissome and distractingly beautiful young lady. These are the youths with whom she flirts, dances, necks and coquettes, and it is a result of this infatuation with her talent to attract that leads her to the final realization that she has lost her ability to feel anything.

This is a stupendous part for Lois Smith, who plays the Perry girl. She is in a state of constant emotional upheaval almost from the opening, and the terrible tragedies of the young cascade upon her with increasing fierceness as the evening advances. I thought Miss Smith did it all wonderfully well, but there came a time when her affected gushings, the mere impact of so much frippery and juvenile extroversion, made me want to turn her over my knee.

The role of her father, the man who should have done just that, but didn't, was played with great warmth and insight by Jay Barney; he loves this girl, he has spoiled her silly, and it's too late now to do much about it.

Margot Stevenson, as the rather frivolous mother — equally at fault—gives a sharp delineation of the well-to-do matron of the era.

Douglas Watson delivers one of his sincere and assured performances as an employe of the girl's father, whose career is blasted as a result of her temporary attraction for him. Peter Brandon is delightfully jaded and articulate as the youthful playboy, and James Hickman is an amusing and bewildered son of Eli.

Other excellent contributions were offered by Jane McArthur, as the girl friend; Virginia Morgan, Barry McGuire and James Olson.

Eldon Elder devised a brilliantly nauseating recreation of an upper-class living room and staircase in the most deplorable period in the history of decoration; Marshall Jamison's direction seemed somewhat high-pitched at times, in the instance of Miss Smith, but was otherwise adroit.

I was charmed and moved by "The Young and Beautiful." Miss Smith gives you a strenuous time, but she never bores you, and in her writing Miss Benson has certainly caught the flair and flavor of Fitzgerald's generation. This one is recommended.

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

October 3, 1955

'Young and Beautiful' Enjoyable; Lois Smith Is Gifted

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Saturday Evening Post was founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1728. I missed the first few issues and don't know much about Ben the First as an editor, but I've kept up with the mag since then, right down to Ben the Second, whose name is Hibbs, and I know that all editors of the SEP and kindred publications have yearned for Young Love the way a lemming craves suicide. "The Young and Beautiful," which opened Saturday evening at the Longacre Theatre, is a lively distillation of all the Young Love stories which have appeared in this five-cent weekly—and its heroine, Lois Smith, is the embodiment of all the teen-age heroines who have struggled to keep the sheet going since Ben Franklin up and died. Both the play and Miss Smith are enjoyable.

The comedy has been assembled by Sally Benson from some short stories F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote early in his career for George Horace Lorimer. It is a skillful job, and if its scenes are inclined to be repetitive, it isn't Miss Benson's fault; there just isn't much variety in Young Love. It is fortunate that Miss Smith is playing the heroine—a 16-year-old Chicago nymph who, as she is described by another character, thinks that boys and girls were made for each other and as soon as possible.

Resourceful Actress

Miss Smith's performance is a tour de force. She tempts, she c a j o l e s, she simpers, pouts, glares, tells innocent lies and is a tigress as she stalks her prey. In an instant she goes from girlish ecstasy to the despair of a tragedienne. She can dance the Maxixe with one boy and woo the next one on a sofa. She is a resourceful young lady who has an instinct for the theatre.

Producer Robert B. Radnitz has assembled a pleasant company of comedians to play games with Miss Smith. Particularly amusing is Peter Brandon, who assumes that this girl is his girl and he will get her if he is just patient. The period of the play is 1915, and he fancies himself as a wordly and sinister fellow as he strides about with a cape and a cane.

Lively and Funny

The girl flits from boy to boy, dropping one with a crash as soon as she sees a new one, scandalizing her social set and worrying her parents. Her trouble is that after a kiss or two the novelty of a boy wears off, and her conquests of downy youths, young business men and a glamorous member of the Lafayette Escadrille are impermanent.

I don't think there is a word of truth in "The Young and Beautiful," for it is as fictitious a piece of fiction as one can encounter. But it is lively and quite funny, and it may be this season's "Time Out for Ginger." Eldon Elder's living-room setting and Motley's costumes are fine period stuff, and the very amiable cast includes Jay Barney, Douglas Watson, Margot Stevenson, Jane McArthur and James Olson. Marshall Jamison has directed the comedy as though he believes it.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

October 3, 1955

THEATER

'The Young and Beautiful'

By WALTER F. KERR

THE adolescent heroine of "The Young and Beautiful," which was given what must be a perfect production at the Longacre on Saturday night, is named Josephine Perry, and she lives in the scrollwork-and-velveteen Chicago of 1915. Josephine is frantically avid for every experience there is in the world—but she cannot love anybody at all.

In return, I don't think audiences are going to love Josephine. But I don't see how they can help but be fascinated by the curiously honest, achingly bitter, dry and devastating little play Sally Benson has written about her.

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The play, adapted from several short stories by F. Scott Fitzgerald, is a very small one. Josephine descends a curving staircase, kicks off her chartreuse slippers, and flings herself expectantly into an Irene Castle Maxixe. Josephine darts to a tasseled sofa, curls up like a kitten of prey, and pretends to enchanted astonishment as a neighborhood swain strolls in. Josephine lounges against living-room pillars, tilts her head hopefully for the newest visiting male, torments her escorts—and even the most casual visitors—until they are captives at her feet.

In time, every one kisses Josephine. And with each kiss her world shatters into smithereens. No kiss, as she tells us, is ever enough, no actual experience can ever quite match the wonderful excitement that her day dreams and her nerves have promised. She is a time bomb, this tantalizing forerunner of the "lost generation," but a time bomb that can never go off.

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Josephine is, as you can see, quite a problem—for her bewildered and not very perceptive parents, for the men who do find themselves drawn into her web, and finally and hopelessly for herself. Lois Smith plays her with enormous insight, tremendous technical virtuosity, and a strange candor that forbids affection. Miss Smith, youngster that she is, is quite above the old pro's habitual bid for sympathy.

She is willing to tell the absolute truth about this trying girl: to show her curling her lip in mounting hysteria, drawing out her words in ear-splitting affectation, posturing absurdly and laughing insanely and—to borrow an old phrase—firing wildly on her rescuers. She is often funny; she is sometimes faintly touching; but she is always grindingly actual. It is even possible that the normal professional's instinct to cheat a little and work in a few more heart tugs is a realistic one; we might shed a tear or two if Miss Smith insisted upon it, and the tears would be good for the box office. Whatever the wisdom of her attack, it must be said that an honorable accuracy is on view; and when this mere slip of a girl suddenly stops in her frantic gayety and says, with despair in her eyes, that she is terribly "tired," you believe in her absolutely.

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The company that tries to keep up with her is excellent. Douglas Watson, as a pipe-smoking Rhodes Scholar who is really too mature to be playing with this kind of fire, is giving what seems to me his finest performance to date. Peter Brandon, after an uncomfortably stylized start, makes a wonderfully menacing figure out of his patient under-age roue. Jane McArthur is quite moving as a friend who is not quite the "tearing speed" that Josephine is, James Hickman is good fun as a model of youthful propriety. Jay Barney's doting father is nicely managed, and James Olson and Margot Stevenson are additionally helpful.

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Eldon Elder has devised an authentic Chicago horror of the period—green stained glass, tiled fireplace, flowering chandeliers and all—to help explain the indifferent and unromantic air in which Josephine finds it difficult to breathe. And Motley has provided an apparently endless array of scalloped, willowy and fur-trimmed period clothes; they are all just right.

It may be that you will find Miss Benson's single-minded concentration on a difficult girl's mannerisms too unrelieved. It may be that you will find this girl herself too special, too enigmatic, too insistent. But the play is a piece of genuine observation, it is written with a shrewd and unsparing hand, and I think that Scott Fitzgerald might well have been pleased with it.